

## Keeping Fruits and Veggies Fresh

Farmers' markets are the ideal place to buy produce. The fruits and veggies are likely to be at peak freshness - and you can support local farmers and ranchers with your purchases. Wherever you buy produce, you can protect your investment - and keep food safe for your family - by following a few important strategies. (1) Reduce food waste by buying only as much as you can eat (or prepare) until your next shopping trip. (2) Take food from market to home as quickly as possible. (3) Wash produce with clean hands when you are ready to eat it, NOT when you bring it home. (4) Refrigerate all cut-up fruit or veggies (fresh or cooked) within two hours. And, remember, different fruits and vegetables require different temperature and humidity levels for optimal shelf life and food safety.

### **Keep fruits and vegetables fresh on your counter tops.**

Many fruits do best when they are ripened on the counter, then refrigerated once fully ripe. Items in this category include melons, peaches, plums, and nectarines, as well as avocados and tomatoes (which are fruit in the botanical sense). It also works for more tropical fruits, such as bananas, papayas, and mangoes. Do not leave fruit in plastic bags on counters. This can slow the ripening process and may lead to rotten spots; paper bags allow better airflow and are fine for most fruits.

### **Keep fruits and vegetables fresh in your refrigerator.**

Most other fresh fruits/veggies are best stored in a clean refrigerator at 40 degrees F or below - in plastic bags with holes to allow for air flow. Use crisper drawers for whole produce, storing fruits separately from vegetables. Fruits give off a gas that can shorten the storage life of other items, while vegetables (like broccoli) give off odors that can affect the taste and quality of fruits. To avoid cross contamination, be sure to keep meat, poultry, and fish separate from produce items.

### **Keep fruits and vegetables fresh in your cupboards.**

Some produce items are best stored in a clean, dry, well-ventilated space with no direct light - like in a cupboard. Included in this category are potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, and winter squash (acorn, butternut, Hubbard, etc.), as well as garlic and onions. When storing canned products in cupboards, use the FIFO rule: **First In, First Out**. Writing the month and year of purchase on top of the can or jar makes it easy to decide which products to use before others.

The produce database at [www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/?page\\_id=164](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/?page_id=164) allows you to search for detailed information on choosing and storing a long list of delicious produce choices. On the same site, you can also find recipes, nutrition information, and other helpful tips on increasing your family's intake of nature's fast food - fruits and vegetables.

Tip from Eat Right Montana